

Tornadoes take toll on Nashville churches

by [Bob Allen](#) in the [April 8, 2020](#) issue



Sumant Joshi, a local resident, volunteered to help clean up rubble at the East End United Methodist Church after it was heavily damaged by storms on March 3, in Nashville, Tennessee. (AP Photo/Mark Humphrey)

Tornadoes that destroyed more than 140 buildings on March 3 in Middle Tennessee left their mark on a number of religious landmarks in Nashville.

Known as the “Protestant Vatican” and “the buckle of the Bible Belt,” the city has more than 700 churches and is home to Bible publishers, Christian universities, and denominational headquarters for groups including the Southern Baptist Convention, the National Association of Free Will Baptists, and the National Baptist Convention USA.

As the sun rose after overnight storms killed at least 24, religious communities joined home owners, businesses, and entertainment venues in picking up the pieces.

One twister tracked across a ten-mile path just north and east of Nashville’s entertainment district, sparing tourist attractions, including the Ryman Auditorium (the original home of the Grand Ole Opry), honky-tonks lining Lower Broadway, and

a 2.1-million-square-foot convention center opened in 2013.

The storm instead tore through largely African American neighborhoods north of downtown, along with Germantown and East Nashville, trendy hotspots featuring restaurants, music venues, high-end apartments, and rising home prices.

The storm turned Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church, a predominantly black congregation first established in 1863, into rubble.

“Twenty-one years ago, when I became pastor of this church—this Sunday as a matter of fact—three months after I was here we had a similar storm, and the steeple was inside the church,” Derrick Moore told local media. “The damage was pretty significant, but nothing compares to what we see right now.”

Members of Mount Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, organized in 1885, gathered for prayer in north Nashville, where only the foundation of their building still stands.

“We look around and we see houses that are now off their foundations,” said pastor Jacques Boyd in video shared on Facebook. “We see houses with no windows. We see houses with no roofs. We see houses without livable conditions, but God, we know that you are able to turn it around. So we ask now, God, that you do what only you can do.”

“And God, we promise you that in spite of this tragedy, in spite of this crisis, we’re still going to give you the glory,” continued the young pastor, installed last October. “We’re still going to give you the praise. We’re still going to open up our mouths with thanksgiving. We’re still going to preach the word of God.”

The Tennessee Baptist Mission Board reported damage to six Southern Baptist churches in Nashville, Mt. Juliet, Cookeville, and Lebanon. The office of the Nashville Baptist Association lost its roof, forcing staff to evacuate due to water damage.

United Methodist News Service reported heavy damage to three churches. East End United Methodist Church in Nashville lost its steeple, one exterior wall, a 1907 organ original to the building, and a recently refurbished stained-glass window depicting Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

The Catholic News Agency reported damage to the historic Church of the Assumption in Germantown, located just 100 yards from the storm’s main path.

The 100-member Pleasant View Church of Christ near Bradford, Tennessee, mourned the loss of a family of four, two of them preschoolers. According to the Churches of Christ newspaper the *Christian Chronicle*, the four will be buried in the church cemetery in a single grave to honor their closeness as a family.

Belmont University, a private Christian school formerly owned by the Tennessee Baptist Convention, escaped a direct hit, but five students and two employees were displaced from their homes, according to the *Belmont Vision*. —Baptist News Global